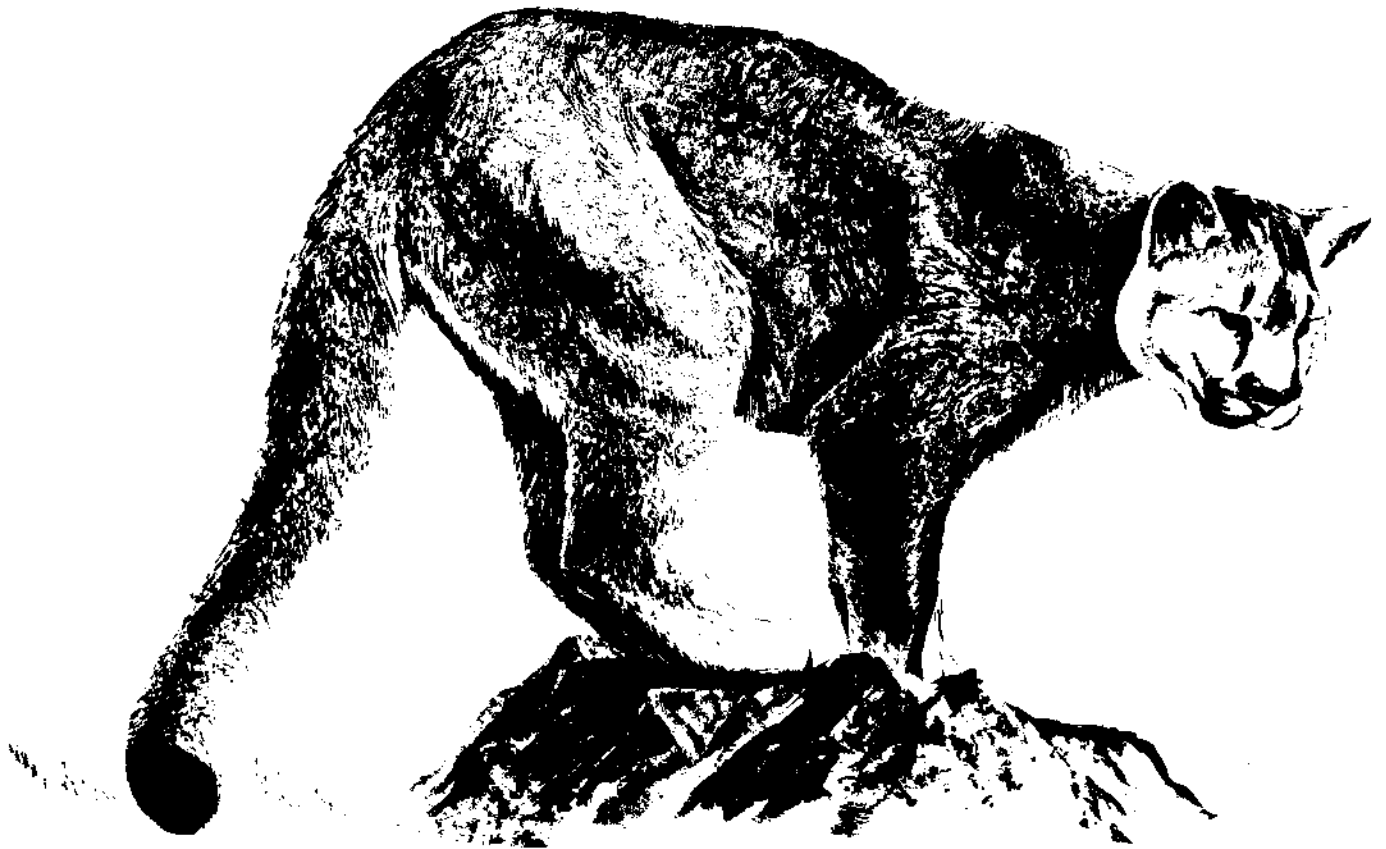


****ATTENTION****

This document is provided for historical purposes only.

Documents contained in the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Document & Publication Archive may contain dated and/or incorrect information. The WDFW Document & Publication Archive is provided as a service to those interested in the history of fish and wildlife management in Washington State.



COUGAR

Washington's big cat, the cougar, stirs the imagination of modern outdoor people as it did the early settlers. Early stories focused on cougar screams in the night, stealthy attacks on livestock and leaps on trail walkers who were not alert. While some accounts are exaggerated, facts supported some of the stories.



FACTSHEET

The overgrown, light brown cat does at times voice a very loud "meow" that could be called a scream by a startled person near by. These hungry hunters take the prey that's easiest to catch, and livestock and fowl are sometimes available and not able to escape. Under unusual conditions cougars have attacked humans.

A small number of domestic animals have been killed by cougar in Washington. The last and only documented case of a cougar killing a human in our state involved a young boy in Okanogan County in 1924.

For some reason the cougar does not appear often in legends of the northwest coastal aborigines. That may be because deer, the cougar's major food, were not plentiful in early times. When the deer population is super-abundant, the cougar population is able to increase. The deer population was very small 200 years ago in what is now Washington State. An almost continuous blanket of trees prevented deer food from growing on the forest floor. Little food, few deer; few deer, fewer cougar.

1935 records estimated the cougar population at 650 animals. In the years since, the cougar population has increased and decreased with the changing supply of surplus deer. Today there are about 2000 cougar in Washington.

The big cat was considered a predator in early times and a bounty was paid for a dead cougar until 1960. Cougar are now hunted as a game animal. An average of 200 cougar per year were taken by hunters between 1972 and 1977.

Cougar are big animals. Adult males are larger than females, with an average weight of 155 pounds and a maximum weight of 200 pounds. An animal this size requires

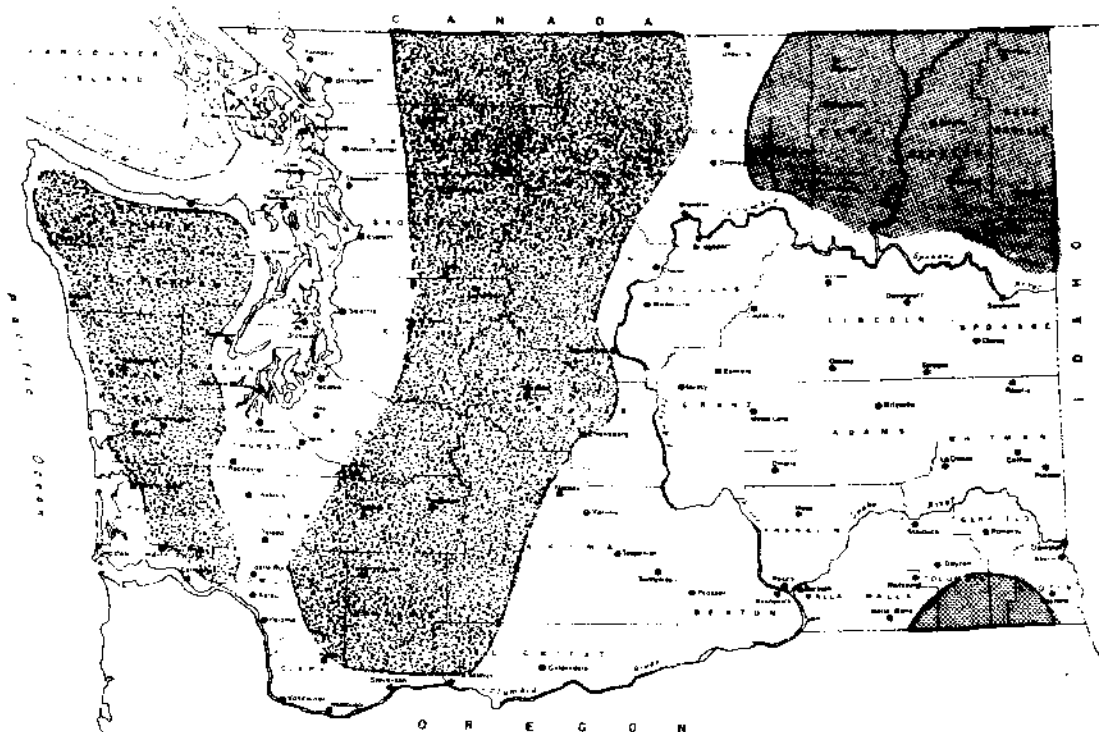
a large amount of food. Deer are the best source of food, but cougar will eat small mammals, including porcupine, rabbit, mountain beaver, ground squirrel and marmot.

Being solitary animals cougars need large territories to find food and survive. Males require up to 30 square miles and females up to 20, if the deer population is over-abundant. With smaller numbers of prey, the cougar must have a larger territory.

Cougar may leave their homeground for a brief mating period and then return to their established territory. Usually three (never more than six) spotted kittens are born, and the ones who survive stay with their mother until two years of age.

Cougar are not endangered in Washington but man's elimination of wildlife habitat threatens their survival.

Cougar require relatively large undisturbed areas. Roads, developments and human activities that destroy deer winter range all squeeze the cougar out of suitable habitat.



Montana Cougar (Felis concolor missoulensis)

Cascades Cougar (Felis concolor oregonensis)